

March 10, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting written testimony for the bill HB 6975 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY LIFE-THREATENING FOOD ALLERGIES IN SCHOOLS.

I have 2 sons that have food allergies. My 6 year old is in Kindergarten, and he has allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, and mustard. My 3 year old has a milk protein allergy. The word "difficult" does not do justice to what it is like to have children with food allergies. As a parent, I have to trust school officials to be responsible for the safety of one of the most precious things in the world to me, and that is an extremely scary and disheartening thing to do when people and school systems are not truly educated in how to handle food allergies. My son has been in tears because food is allowed in the classroom for parties, and he has to eat something different. Although I keep his "safe desserts" in a freezer in the nurse's office, he knows that it is still different from what the other children eat. Next year, when he is in school all day, we will have to deal with him eating in a cafeteria where peanut butter is allowed to be brought from home. While he can sit at a nut-free table if we choose, the effect of exclusion will be felt, as we are already dealing with it now for parties.

His school has been very open to listening to me and working with me as best as they can, but in general I feel that most schools need a better understanding of what can happen with an allergy, how children are made to feel, and how things can so easily be changed to not always include food. Why can't a school party ban food and provide little toy favors instead? (Who wants their child coming home on a sugar high anyway?!) With all the many foods in existence, why can't peanuts and nuts be banned in schools. Will it be an inconvenience for some families? I'm sure it will be. But it's MY, and many others, child's life on the line. I think we can all agree waiting a few more hours to get home and have the peanut butter sandwich then is worth my child's life. In Kindergarten, he has already been made fun of for his allergies, with children taunting him.

Another issue I would love to see addressed is having all bus drivers carry epipens on the buses and be trained in administering them. My son's bus drivers have been great with wiping down his seat (an assigned seat to keep him in front where they can make sure he doesn't eat or touch anything, whether by him or another child), and they have my phone number to call me in case of emergency. If I hadn't pushed for this, and an incident did occur, to my knowledge they would have to call dispatch, and THEN 911. Precious minutes of my son's life would be passing by without anything at all being done. An anaphylactic reaction can only

take minutes itself. Right now, my son is too young to self-carry an epi-pen, but to know that a bus driver could assist in an emergency would be life-changing for us. Right now, I've been told that the drivers cannot even touch the children in an emergency. So, should anything happen to my son, not only would his life be at risk, he isn't even able to have anyone to touch him in comfort. Why would this chance be taken if bus drivers can be trained? Why do we try to make every accommodation for people with disabilities (wheelchairs, poor eye sight, hearing impaired), when children with food allergies could actually DIE from their disability? Isn't a bit more extra money, time, and energy worth any child's life??

Also, education would go so far in helping people that don't have to deal with food allergies become more aware. I won't even go into all the comments I have had made to me, but suffice it to say, I've been horrified at the way people think of allergies, and how completely ignorant they are. (I had a teacher say that it's good my son is aware of being different because he will come into contact with many different people from him life. I'm sorry, but I don't think having a different religion or skin color will kill you on it's own. My son's allergies could.) More awareness could save a life.

Please consider all that I have mentioned – please do it for my 2 beautiful children, who I worry every day could have something happen to them, and for all the other children out there with food allergies. I know we all have to let our children grow up and trust others to be in their lives, but until you've walked a day in a food allergy parent's life, it's much easier said than done, especially with the lack of resources, awareness, and education out there. Making some changes, especially in the school system, would go so far and help families like mine.

Thank you so much for your time!

Sincerely,

Patricia Hamilton
Wallingford, CT